Chapter-II

THE STATUS OF MEITEI PANGAL WOMEN IN 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES

Different historical sources and written literatures recorded that the mass migration of the Muslims into Manipur from other parts of India started from the reign of King Khagemba (1597-1652). Muslims had different nomenclatures depending on the country or region of origin. In China they were known as ‘Hui’, in Thailand ‘How’, in Burma (Myanmar) they are called ‘Panshi’\(^1\) and in Manipur they are known as Pangal/Meitei Pangal.

However some Puyas (sacred Meitei texts) mention that Muslim settlement started before 1606 A.D. However some puyas like ‘Sakok Lamlen Ahanba’\(^2\) and ‘Kanglei Langba Pakhangba’ Puya mention that during King Naophangba’s (594-624 A.D.) reign, three Mussalmans came from the southern direction. They spread Islam and some Meiteis converted to Islam and they followed the burial practice of Islam. But they went back after some time.\(^3\) This statement has however not been corroborated by any other known written or oral source. L. Joychandra Singh also wrote that certain Muslim Pangal immigrants came to this land during Meidingu Naofangba’s reign\(^4\). Some local Muslims such as Farooq Ahmed mention two sections of the earliest Muslims in Manipur viz.

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\(^4\) L. Joychandra Singh, *The Lost Kingdom* (Royal Chronicle of Manipur), Imphal, 1989, p. 1
the ‘Aribah’ and ‘Khalazi’ and their abode in the Meitei kingdom. Literally, ‘Aribah’ means ‘pure Arab’ and ‘Khalaz’ in Arabic mean ‘dark and white’, i.e. the mother was dark in complexion and the father had a fairer complexion, the children were either dark or a combination of both. The ‘Aribam’ family of Manipuri Muslims came in the time of King Naophangba in Manipur.

This mass migration took place in the year 1606 A.D, when the then King captured the Muslims from a battle field where he was fighting against his own brother Prince Sanongba who was supported by Cachar troops and Muslims from Tarf land (North East of Bengal). Most of the Cacharis troops with Sanongba escaped from the battle field and only the Muslims numbering around 1000 were captured by the Meitei King Khagemba. After knowing the art and the skill of warfare of these captive Muslims, the King wanted to improve the number of his army/troops especially for reasons of defense and so he added them to his army. It was because during that time Manipur was invaded several times by the neighboring country of Ava (Burma) and the Manipuri kingdom was facing a lack of sufficient troops. The liberal policy of the King permitted them to settle in Manipur and the ruler also gave Meitei-ladies in marriage to them. Thus the settlement of the Muslims in Manipur started from 1606 A.D. However they were allowed to follow their own religion Islam.

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8 . Ibid
9 O. Bhogeshor and M.A Janab Khan, opcit. P.26
10 Kulachandra Sharma and Badarruddin, opcit, p. 1
The Muslims included mercenaries, drummers, weavers, potters, washermen, blacksmiths, musketeers, brass makers, horse and elephant keepers, stone artisans such as Taophing, and Sarik Taophing a goldsmith. Other prisoners included fifteen palanquin carriers, fifteen cavalry soldiers and three elephants.\footnote{Gangumei Kamei, History of Manipur Pre colonial period Vol.1, pp. 214-15.}

Most of the Meitei women, who got married to these foreigners, were ‘Nai’ i.e. those were in the service of the Queen and staying in the palace\footnote{R.K Sanahal, opcit, p. 16, O. Bhogeshor and M.A Janab Khan, opcit. P.26}.

Those men who came from East Bengal, irrespective of their religion were called ‘Pangal’\footnote{RK Jhaljit, opcit, p. 13}. Their marriages were conducted according to the Islamic customary laws, “Nikah” was performed, and was witnessed by the King\footnote{M.A.Ahemad, Manipuri Muslimgi chatnbi amasung Harao Kumhei, Published by Writers Union, Manipur, Masajit Road, Imphal, 2011, p. 12}. However it would have been practically impossible for the King to have been present for a thousand marriages. Manipuri Puyas such as ‘Nongsamei Paya’, ‘Pangal Thorakpa’ and ‘Meitei Pangal Hourakpham’ state that the King was present at the marriage of first 18 Meitei women to Muslims. The King gave the first Muslims Meitei women to marry; this is significant, because these Meitei women formed the nucleus of a stable Muslim society which rendered help to the King whenever required. This was because of the influence exerted by the Meitei women over their husbands who gladly embraced the Meitei way of life. Except for their profession of Islam, they were practically indistinguishable from the Meiteis and were given the nomenclature of ‘Meitei Pangal’ (Meitei from Manipur and Pangal from Bangal) or Bengal. However after the movement for
Religious Revivalism, at the end of the 19th century, the Meitei Pangal became engaged in a separate Quest for Identity. Although the first groups of Muslims were soldiers, once permanently settled in Manipur, they became a part of civil society, as they integrated into it completely, facilitated by their Meitei wives. The Muslim men who married with the Meitei women did not reflect much on the fact that the Meiteis were a different community and once amalgamated they had no regrets on marrying women from the Meitei community. One interviewee however stated that Muslims should marry into their own community. But this was not possible in the 17th century because of the small number of Muslims. The Muslims possessed a ‘Dual Identity’ - ‘Meitei and Pangal’.

In the Manipuri society, which is patriarchal, the father is the head of the family and he had power over his wife, son, unmarried daughters and slaves of the family. A married woman was escorted to the house of her husband and she had to submit to the authority of her husband. On the other hand, the King was the head of the state and he supervised his subjects irrespective of gender. The Meitei women, who married Muslims, had a dual duty. They had to abide by the King’s orders, as also that of their husbands.

Muslim women in Manipur were Meitei converts to Islam; they possessed the qualities of Meitei women in that they did not hide behind the veil, but played an active role in society, economy, culture, religion. Reena Laishram has stated that one notable characteristic of Meitei women was their dominance in economic affairs. These Meitei women converts possessed an indomitable spirit as is

15 RK Jhaljit, Op cit, p. 32
16 Ibid
illustrated by integrating their Muslim husbands completely into Meitei society. They were practically indistinguishable from the Meitei’s except for their profession of Islam. The women exercised so much power that Muslim men came to be known by the nomenclature 'Meitei Pangal'. The research work will focus first, on how these Meitei women were successful in their endeavor to totally assimilate their Muslim husbands into Manipuri society. There were linguistic difficulties initially between husband and wife. The wives spoke in Meiteilon but the husbands know only Urdu, and Farsi\textsuperscript{17}. However, the Meitei women converts to Islam were easily able to influence their Muslim husbands to adopt the ‘lingua franca’ of Manipur i.e. Meiteilon. This is illustrated by the facts that during Khunjaoba’s (1652-1666) reign, Muslims spoke Meiteilon fluently, and were even able to teach Islamic religious laws in the native dialect to their women\textsuperscript{18}. The Meitei women did not antagonize their husbands and they voluntarily accepted to abide by the Islamic Law. This would not have been difficult because in the 17\textsuperscript{th}, 18\textsuperscript{th}, and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries, the Muslims were not very rigid in the observance of religious rituals\textsuperscript{19}.

The name of some of the Meitei women who married Muslims were:-

1. Yumnam Ningol Peti,
2. Nongthonbam Ningol Maitek,
3. Chakpram Ningol Melei,

\textsuperscript{17} It is pertinent to remember that Assam was never conquered by the Mughals and so mastery over Urdu in North East India would not have been widespread.
\textsuperscript{18} M.A. Ahmed, Op cit p. 12.
\textsuperscript{19} Salam Irene The Muslims of Manipur, Akansha Publication, New Delhi, 2010, p.
1. Thokchom Ningol Kiyambi,

4. Thokchom Ningol Chaobi,

5. Salam Ningol Tombi,

6. Wangkheirakpam Ningol Koingambi,

7. Satpam Ningol Tombi,

8. Salam Ningol Noibi,

9. Laishram Ningol Tombi,

10. Lisleima,

11. Thoubal Ningol Khambi,

12. Melei (daughter of Lanmiyamba),

13. Nongthonbam Chanu Shaktek,

14. Yumnam Ningol Yangbi,

15. Nongthonbam shanu Hemabati,

16. Yumnam Chanu Lembi,

17. Moirang Chanu Kunjo.
According to one of the interviewees of the Meitei women listed here as no. 2 and 3, Nongthonbam Ningol Maitek and Chakpram Ningol Melei, were both married to Muhammad Shani, the leader of the Muslims in 1606 A.D.  

There was also a Muslim woman who came to Manipur during Khagemba’s reign after the war. Her name was Cheinandi (Zeinandi Bibi), she was the only Muslim woman who came during his time, because her brother namely Shaprat Muhammad, who had been a war captive in 1606 A.D. was already settled in Manipur. He returned to Taraf land and brought his sister and brother Kakshram, who also settled in Manipur. By the order of the King Khagemba, Shaprat Muhammad had settled in the Meitei Kingdom and he went back to Taraf with the King’s permission to bring his brother Kakshram Muhammad and sister Cheinandi. The reason for this was Muhammad Shani missed his family and felt sad. On learning of his sorrow, the King gave him permission to return to his homeland and come back to Manipur with his family. He was accompanied by six others, namely Waikhom Gangaram, Taorem Kabomba, Oinam Pukchao, Mayang Suleiya (name of a Muslim man), Haobam Lamthok and Thokchom Chando. The composition of this group was mixed-there were 5 Meiteis and one non native Muslim. They were to ensure that Muhammad Shani returned back to Manipur. They carried with them some books and a letter from the King and reached the court of Muhammad Naziri, King of Tarf land. The Tarf King having learnt of the peaceful settlement of the Cachari Muslim war captives in Manipur and Khagemba’s affording protection to them

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20 Interview with Kheiruddin Kulakpam. Retd. Central Government staff, 24/5/2017
sent him a letter, also some gold, expensive cloths, silver utensils and other beautiful articles, made of silver as gifts. He permitted them to return back to Manipur along with Muhammad Shani’s brother and sister. Cheinandi married one of the Muslim prisoners of war named Ishak Ali Mulla who lived in Patsot area.

Because of their small number, the then King of Manipur permitted the practice of polygamy to the early Muslim settlers. For example King Khagemba gave two women viz. Nongthonbam Ningol Maitek and Chakpram Ningol Melei as wives along with five ‘paris’ (2 and half acres of land) of paddy fields to Muhammad Shani. Moreover, Ayekpamcha Muhammad Niyamtula also married two women Salam Chanu Noibi and Wangkheirakpam Chanu Koingambi. Because of this practice of polygamy, it was possible for the Meitei Pangal women to exercise a great influence over their husbands in various spheres. Nongsamei Puya also recorded that in Charairongba’s time Nanphou (grandson of Muhamad Shani) divorced his wife Bibi Bakom because she had no child and he remarried another woman Changning (daughter of Sayed Ngangba, a close friend of the King). This provided an opportunity to his second wife to teach him how to assimilate completely into Meitei society, although he had already been familiarised to it by his first wife. Nanphou married a third time.

22 Ibid, p. 35
23 Nongthonbam is a subclan of Mangang Clan of the 7 clans of the Meiteis
24 Chakpram is a subclan of Angom clan of the 7 clans of the Meiteis
25 Ayekpan is a subclan of Mangang Clan of the 7 clans of the Meiteis
26 Salam is a subclan of Luwang Clan of the 7 clans of the Meiteis
27 Wairokpam is a subclan of Salang Leisangthem Clans of the 7 clan of the Meiteis
28 RK Sanahal, Pangal, Hourakpham, p. 53.
with Thangjam Chanu Hongbi but he died after having a son, named Khoiju. On the other hand after her divorce by Nanphou, Babi Bakom remarried with her brother in law Tomba, because she did not want to marry into another Sagei (surname). All Muslim women want to share solidarity with Meitei women. Salman Khurshid had remarked-‘Be that as it may for different parts of India, at least for Manipur, the wholesome organic assimilation theory is validated in this remarkable book on the Muslims of Manipur. In the forward to the book ‘The Muslims of Manipur’ by Salam Irene, the then Minister of State for Corporate Affairs and Minority Affairs, Government of India Mr. Salam Khurshid had mentioned the social organization of Muslims along ‘Shaqzi’ (clans) kinship groups related by blood, makes it difficult to trace their original class of Pangals. Babi Bakom gave birth to a son Laiba and Laiba was brought up by Leima Nungthilchaibi when he was young. In fact she was responsible for her son’s upbringing, this meant that the son when he became an adult was completely conversant with all the traditions, customs, and language of the Meiteis. This illustrates the high position of Pangal women who took the initiative to remarry. It was pertinent to note that as early as the 17th, and 18th centuries women converted to Islam, were sufficiently empowered, because even after being divorced, they married again. This illustrated their high status and the influence they wielded in family and society.

29 Ibid, p. 58  
31 Ibid
At this time Manipur was divided into 2 *panas* (administrative units) viz. Ahallup and Naharup Pana. Because of their wives’ influence, the Muslim men were eager to be admitted into the Meitei Panas where they too began to participate actively. They celebrated Meitei festivals and fairs, took responsibility in administration, and participated in competition of indigenous games and sports\(^{32}\). In the art and culture too women taught them the famous Meitei songs and dances. Once they acquired fluency in Meiteilon they too sang Meitei songs and most of the songs were folk songs\(^{33}\). This exemplified the Meitei wife’s influence over their husbands.

The high status enjoyed by Meitei Pangal women in the 17\(^{th}\) or 18\(^{th}\) century is further corroborated by the action of the King Khunjaoba (1652-1666), who gave ‘Patsoi Lamjao’ (a piece of land)\(^{34}\) to Ningthem Maibi Hunjabi, she married her younger sister Kiyambi to a Muslim named Musakalamun, who came to Manipur in the year (1675) with six others, namely, Esekramula with his wife Fotma, Kshetri Tasi, Bamon Sitaram, Konok Takhila and Konok Basudev from Pramio\(^{35}\) land (1653). Musakalamun cultivated the Patsoi Khunjao, which received the nomenclature of ‘Patsoi Chaba’ which was changed into ‘Patsoichaba Mayum’ after some days. Because of his cultivating expertise the Muslims called his house ‘Pasoimayum’, and his clan came to be known as

\(^{32}\) Kulachandra Sharma and Badarruddin, Op cit, p. 3  
\(^{33}\) MM. Ahmed, Pangalsinggi Khunung Esei Neina Wreng, kayamuddin Pukrihongbam, ‘Pangalsinggi khunung esei amasung masigi hourakhpham’, Writers Union, Manipur Imphal, 2013, p.5  
\(^{34}\) Meaning giving land to provide a livelihood.  
\(^{35}\) ‘Pramio’ is a big land situated at the North-East (nongpok meiram) of Tarf land.
‘Baseimayum/Pasoimayum’\textsuperscript{36}. This is in keeping with the Meitei tradition of naming a clan after their occupation. The Muslim men under the influence of their Meitei wives were quite happy to be accorded sageis\textsuperscript{37}.

During Khunjaoba’s reign only one Meitei woman named Maibam Chanu Kiyambi was married to a Muslim. During Paikhomba’s reign, many Muslims came in to the Kingdom but the names of the women who married these Muslims have not been mentioned.

During Charairongba’s reign (1697-1709), Ahong son of Muhammud Shani (Bor Senna Lanjingba) married Bibi Jainab, daughter of Sayad Ambiya (who came during Paikhomba’s reign and who had married a Meitei woman Nongthonbam Chanu Hemabati). Intra-communities marriages now, commenced for example, Nanphou (son of Ahong) married Bibi Begum (Grand-daughter of Lukhiya and daughter of Lahong). Both Nanphou and Bibi Begum were Muslims\textsuperscript{38}. During Paikhomba’s time, Thangjam Chanu Hongbi married a Muslim showing that marriage of Muslims to Meiteis continued. The Meitei women did not exhibit any qualms or reluctance to marry Muslim men, because the latter were quite happy to adopt a ‘Dual Identity’ viz. Meitei Pangal i.e. Meitei for the Manipuri and Pangal because they originally came from Bengal. Meitei women today still maintain a close bond with their Meitei sisters; this too is an index of their empowerment.

\textsuperscript{36} Kulachandra Sharma and Badarruddin, Op cit, p.78
\textsuperscript{37} The Muslims possessed great expertise in agriculture and gardening.
\textsuperscript{38} Oinam Bhogeshor Singh and M A Janab Khan Ipham, Op cit, p. 86
The Muslim Diaspora belonged to the Sheikh, Sayyid, and Pathan section of the Muslims. Their ancestral places were Sylhet, Gauradesh, Gujarat, Cachar etc. All these groups initially were allowed to marry local Meitei girls by the order of the King Khagemba but subsequently love marriages were permitted and became popular, and the trend of marrying Meitei women continued unabated. This would demonstrate that the intrinsic qualities of Meitei women especially for hard work appealed to the Pangal, who were amenable to being influenced by Meitei culture and tradition.

In the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries the Muslim women of Manipur, married or unmarried, were not confined in zenanas, as they were in Bengal and Hindustan and they did not cover their faces before strangers\textsuperscript{39}. So they did not adopt the traditional Muslim dress of burqa, purdah or veil. Rather they made their husbands and sons adopt the Meitei dress of pheisom (dhoti) and vest and even used the Meitei traditional dress in marriage.

The Muslim women as their Meitei sisters, who did not marry Muslims were industrious, because in Manipur it was the practice for the women to manage the economy of the state. Meitei had not only to defend the Manipur Kingdom but to perform ‘\textit{Lallup}’\textsuperscript{40}. As a consequence most of the work of the country except the heaviest was performed by them (women). ‘All the marketing is done by women, all the work of buying and selling in public, and the carrying

\textsuperscript{39} R. Brown, Statistical Account of Manipu, A Mittal Publication, Calcutta, 2001,p. 17
\textsuperscript{40} Lalup system, a service for ten days in rotation, thus bringing every male above sixteen years of age on duty ten days in forty. No remuneration for Lalup- it was a feudal service rendered to the king..
of to and fro of the articles to be sold; while in home they were busy employed in weaving and spinning. One of the reasons for the status enjoyed by Muslim women was their hard work. Women as agricultural workers, weavers, dyers or traders, control the economic life of the Kingdom. Since the men folk had to render their service to the state under the Lallup system, it was left to the women to look after production activities. Women therefore had the opportunity for economic autonomy and as bread-earners of the family in particular and society in general. This is to a large extent applicable to the Muslim women because they possessed the dual identity of Meitei and Pangal.

‘The Pangal society is based on kinship and is highly influenced by the culture of the Meiteis. By kinship we mean a social relationship based upon family relatedness, as culturally defined. The culture determines which family relationships are considered significant, the rights and obligations of specific type of related persons and forms of obligations that exist among related persons’. The form of relationship based on marriage was an essential part of the kinship system. All types of kinship – primary, secondary, tertiary, affinal and consanguineous are found in the social system of the Pangal.

The Meitei Pangals (Muslims) amalgamated into Meitei society from 1606 A.D. They adopted the Meitei way of living though they were the followers of Islam. The culture of the Muslims (Islamic culture) everywhere is based on

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41 R. Brown, op. cit. p. 76.
two factors i.e. Islamic belief, way of life and code of ethics, and the influence of the custom of the people among whom they (the Muslims) live. Therefore the culture of the Meitei Pangal is a combination of both the Islamic and Meitei culture\textsuperscript{44}.

**GENEALOGY**

Most of the interviewees could trace back their genealogy at least for 4 generations; this is akin to the Meitei custom where the genealogy tree is maintained as it is necessary to consult it on auspicious occasions like birth, marriage etc. An interviewee stated that it was compulsory for Muslims to know their genealogy of 4 generations\textsuperscript{45}. The salai (clan), status and ancestry were officially co-ordinate, and reflected in the genealogical records of the Meiteis\textsuperscript{46}. The social relationship, marital customs and behavior of one individual to another are all governed by kinship rule. Indeed it is this kinship network which binds the entire Meitei society\textsuperscript{47}. The Meitei practice clan exogamy as did the Mietei Pangals.

**LANGUAGE**

Initially as the Muslim men did not know or understand Meiteilon the ‘lingua franca’ of Manipur and the Meitei women did not understand the language the ‘Muslim men spoke’, they communicated through body language,

\textsuperscript{44} Arambam Samarendro, *Manipur and Meitei Pangal*, (Ed) A. Rahman, “The Culture of the Manipuri Muslim (Pangals) and Meitei influence”, P.S. printing, Imphal, 1998p.25
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid
\textsuperscript{46} Interview with Moinam Farooq, Manipur Government Staff, Police dept. 24/4/2017
\textsuperscript{47} Rena Laishram opcit, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, p. 199
but in a short while 3 to 4 decades the Muslim men were fluent in Meiteilon. The Manipuri Muslim ‘adopted Manipuri’ (Meiteilon) and accepted it as their mother tongue. It became their lingua franca. They are the only community who speak Meiteilon like the Meiteis though other communities also spoke the language. But the Muslims were not natives of Manipur prior to 1606 A.D. However this language is not free from Muslim influence. Many Urdu words (Arabic, Persian, Turkish) entered into the Meitei vocabulary such as, Qalam, Quli, Qamis, Rumal, Tarikh, Dukan, Dalali, Dalil, Darji, Bazar, Shahar, Ain, Izzat, Einak (anok), Marammat etc. such words and many others become common properties of the Muslims and Meiteis alike. Further the Manipuri Muslims introduced many Arabic and Persian words into Manipuri (Meiteilon). This is because there was no objection to using whatever word was at hand that was acceptable to the people. It is similar to the mixed use of Arabic, Persian and Hindustani words in the land revenue system of Medieval India, where there was no systematic attempt to rigidly adhere to Muslim words only.

SAGEI FORMATION

In social life it is significant to note that the family life and social organisation of the Pangals was greatly influenced by the Meitei family institution and social organizations. The Pangals were absorbed to Meitei society either by accommodating traditional Yumnaks or by introducing new Yumnaks. Sagei carries the meaning of relative, kin, household etc. A Sagei, therefore is a

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cognate group because of their consanguineous relationship. It may be noted that nomenclature of Muslim Sageis bear the imprint of how it came to be christened in different ways on the basis of, as mentioned above, either individual skill or place of origin or the name of place where they settled, etc.

According to W. Ibohal Singh, Muslims of Manipur were also allotted family title of yumnak, sagei according to their occupation. The names of sub clans were assigned according to occupation, post and places of settlement in Manipur. He further stated that now-a-days Pangals hardly used their family titles like in the earlier periods. Regarding the social stratification of the Pangals, Md. Latif Shah states that “all sections of the Pangals do not enjoyed social status, however, they are no social distinctions. The names of their Sageis were assigned by the King of Manipur, on the basis of skill and aptitude. There is no hierarchical differentiation within the Sagei, based on either economy or occupation. There are around sixty-two (62) Muslim Sagais in Manipur.

FOOD

The chronicles contain ample evidence of the change in the diet of the Meitei section of the population which is due to the introduction of Hinduism at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The earliest reign seems to have been

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50 Md Shakil Ahmed, Essay in Sociology Muslim in Manipur, New Delhi, 2011, p. 84.
51 W. Ibohal Singh, op. cit., p. 608.
52 Ibid, p. 608
53 Muhammad Latif Shah, Pangal Manipuri Muslim People of India, Manipur Ed, By K.S Singh, Times of India, Delhi, 1998, p. 197
54 Sageis: In Meitei society, the sagei or family name is known as Yumnak in Meitei Language. Pronounced as "yoom-naak". Ethnic yumnaks are used in the Meitei community including the Meitei Pangal.
one long feast with hecatombs of fat cattle and oceans of spirituous drinks, even culminating on more than one instance in fatalities due to an excessive appreciation of the good cheer. Fish is eaten and common article of diet. Rice forms the staple food. Honey is eaten by many, who buy it from the hunters. Children are said to eat the white ant and grasshopper.

The Muslims who came in 1606 A.D. probably depended entirely on their women with regard to the preparation of meals. As a result they easily adopted Meitei traditional food habits and foods such as uti, eronba, chamthong/kangsoi, ngari, singju etc. These are the names of traditional Meitei dishes— for example ‘Uti’ is a combination of rice, green peas cooked in a special way with the addition of soda bi-carbonate. However the Muslim men were not willing to eat snails which the Meiteis relish. Surprisingly Muslim delicacies such as romali rotis, kababs, and biryani were not evident in their kitchens in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. They also did not insist on their Meitei wives cooking traditional Muslim cuisine, which does differ in different Muslim countries. The Meitei wives of Muslims continued the taboos of not cooking after the birth of a child for 40 days. They probably also followed the Meitei restrictions eating only plain rice with salt and some dry fish. The Meitei women who married Muslim had to refrain from certain foods which the Muslims did not partake of, though the latter

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56 R. Brown, op. cit., p. 21.
appreciated and relished the daily cuisine prepared by their Meitei wives. They were especially fond of Meitei Ngari and Kangsoi.\textsuperscript{58}

R. Brown mention that, “the Munnipories, both male and female, inveterate chewers of pan sooparee (betal nut enclosed in a pan leaf). The whole of this is brought from the neighboring district of Cachar, and form a considerable trade. The betal nut tree will not grow in Munnipore territory. Tobacco is used by all classes and ages, and the tobacco is used and smoked as in Bengal. I am informed that opium is not used by the Hindoo part of the population, neither is there any consumption whatever of India hemp or other intoxicating drugs.”\textsuperscript{59}

**DRESS**

In the matter of dress, Muslims especially women are greatly influenced by the Meitei sartorial style. The women wear the same costume. T.C. Hodson remarked that “the Pangans, men, and women, with the difference that the Pangal women wear *Faneks*, which they fasten under the right breast while Meitei women fasten this garment under the left breast. The colours of the Pangal women differ from those used by Manipuris, as for instance, the green used by a Meitei will be darker, less glaring than the shade of green allowable to the Pangal”\textsuperscript{60}. Most of the women are attired in a *phanek* (a kind of sarong indigenously woven and worn by Meitei Ladies)\textsuperscript{61}. The Shariat enjoins the

\textsuperscript{58} Interview with Moinam Farooq, op.cit.

\textsuperscript{59} R. Brown, op. cit., p. 33.

\textsuperscript{60} T.C. Hodson, opcit, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{61} Salam Irene, op cit, p. 100
Muslim ladies to cover their lower bodies up to the ankle\textsuperscript{62}. The \textit{phanek} also extends up to the ankle. The difference was in the length of the blouse worn by the Muslim and Meitei women. The Muslim blouse was longer, but both Muslim and Meitei women wore an ‘\textit{inaphi}’ (shawl) over the blouse. Muslim women also favored the color green for their dress which is traditionally associated with Muslims. They wore the \textit{phanek ‘Mayek naibi’}. The Pangal men also adopted Meitei \textit{pheijom}, \textit{Khudei} (Lungi) and were generally seen in this dress\textsuperscript{63}. The Meitei Pangan women wear ‘\textit{Khudang Shangbi}’ or long sleeved blouses.\textsuperscript{64}

R. Brown remarks on the ornaments, “Nose ornaments are limited to a small piece of gold wire in the side of the nostril. The only ornaments which may be worn without restriction are earrings: these may be worn by any one. With regard to other ornaments of gold, permission for all but the upper classes to wear them must be obtained from the Raja. Ornaments of other metals than gold may be worn freely”.\textsuperscript{65} T.C. Hodson remarks that “The earring worn by the men and by the majority of the women are of plain gold, generally a thin casing over a solid piece of lac. The necklace worn by women the women of the upper classes are of tasteful, simple filigree designs manufactured by native goldsmiths, who prefer almost pure gold to work on, as their tools are not tempered for work on alloyed gold. The bracelets and necklaces are of chased and hammered patterns, while plain beads formed round a hollow nucleus of lac are common.”\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{62} Arambam Samarendro, \textit{Manipur and Meitei Pangal}, (Ed) A. Rahman, “The Culture of the Manipuri Muslim (Pangals) and Meitei influence”, P.S. printing, Imphal, 1998 p.5
\textsuperscript{63} Salam Irene, op cit, p. 99
\textsuperscript{64} Interview with S.M. Sheikh, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{65} R. Brown, op cit, pp., 29-30.
\textsuperscript{66} T.C. Hodson, opcit., p., 19.
On the occasion of marriage too, the Pangal bride largely emulated her Meitei sister, whereas the Pangal bridgroom was attired in traditional white Meitei garments with a turban (kokyet/koiyet) on the head again a Meitei head dress. Most of the groom’s parties were also clad in white. White is the color of choice in Manipur for all kinds of religious and auspicious ceremonies. At the marriage they wore the same dress and ornaments as the Meiteis, for example the bride wore the ‘Meitei potloi’ (a dress specially designed for marriage) it has appliquéd designs in red around its border. She has to wear a short sleeved shirt, which is covered with a thin white cloth, Conch bangles are put around her hands, different kind of necklaces decorate the neck and ‘Kajenglei’ (head ornament) is placed on the head. The bridegroom wore the wedding pheijom (White dhoti) and a white shirt without collar but having full sleeves (paijama) and ‘Koiyet’ (Turban/head dress). A length of folded white cloth crosses the chest of the groom starting from the lower right side and going up to the left shoulder\textsuperscript{67}.

\textsuperscript{67} Mutua Bahadur, Manipuri Textiles from Mangladesh and Myanmar, Published by Mutua Museum, Imphal, 2009 pp, 26-27.
Meitei Pangal women in traditional Dress
Meitei Pangal bride in traditional Dress
HOUSING

The Manipuri Muslims followed the Meitei’s style of building houses i.e. the house was to face east. Two essentials of the Meitei house i.e. the ‘phunga’ (hearth) and ‘sumang’ (courtyard) were part of a Muslim house. Colonel McCulloch says that “the dwelling houses of the Munniporees are all of the same form, but those of the rich are larger and constructed of better materials than those of the poor, that is, the posts and beams of the rich are of woods, while those of the poor are of bamboo. The walls of both are of reeds plastered with a mixture of earth and cow dung, and the roofs of all are thatched with grass. All the dwelling houses face to the east, in which direction they have a large open mangol (verandah). In the verandah the family sits during the day, and in it all the work of the household is carried on, except cooking, which is performed inside; in the south side of the verandah is the seat of honor. Here a mat or cloth is placed for the head of the family, upon which no one intrudes. Inside the house is without partitions. The bed of the head of the family is placed in what is called the ‘Luplenga’, close to the wall on the south side about the middle. It is usually screened by mats. The daughters usually sleep on the north side. There are no windows in the houses, the only light admitted being by two doors, one opening into the open verandah, the other to the north, near the north-western corner of the house. The fireplace is on the floor towards the north-west corner. There is no chimney. The fuel used is generally dried reed jungle. This answers every purpose in the warm weather, but is a sorry substitute for wood in the colder

68 Interview with S.M. Sheikh, opcit.
months”\textsuperscript{69}. However, in their houses no compartment is reserved for worship of the family deity, as they have no such deity. Traditional mode of constructing houses was as the Meiteis.

Further, the Muslims follow the Meitei custom of selecting the site of the foundation of the building by making a division of nine equal Sub-plots in a whole plot of land (ingkhol). No buildings were erected in the sub-plots assigned to vulture, flag or smoke.\textsuperscript{70}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Traditional Meitei Pangal House.}

Photo: S.M.Sheikh.
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\textsuperscript{69} T.C. Hodson, op.cit pp. 25-26.
\textsuperscript{70} A.Rahaman, op cit p, 5-6.
MARRIAGE

Muhamadan law defines marriage as a contract for the purpose of procreation and the legalizing of children. Marriage of the Muslim is not a sacrament but a civil contract. In Meitei Pangal society no matrimonial alliance is made within the same Sagei which too is the influence of the Meitei custom on the Meitei Pangal. In Meitei society no restriction was imposed therefore, the re-marriage of widows, widowers and divorces could be affected illustrating that such women enjoyed a high place in society. Society allowed the widows, widowers and the divorcees to re-marry. Likewise the Pangals also allowed remarriage of widows, widowers and divorcees. This was because of their assimilation into Meitei society. They do not generally marry with their close relatives or with clan members. So exogamy rather than endogamy is practiced. In the Pangal society marriage between clan members were strictly forbidden and anyway were not popular. It is believed that marriage between the same sageis or clan members resulted in adverse consequences. This belief is the influence of the Meiteis who follows the system of exogamy. It is said that during King Charairongba’s reign, one clan ‘Maraimayum’ was punished and the whole clan was exterminated except an unborn child, for arranging an endogamous marriage (probably between parallel cousins). A Rahaman has corroborated the aforesaid statement.

71 Ibid.
73 Imtiaz Ahmed, Family, kinship and marriage among the Muslims, Khonthang (1st issue), Imphal, August,1978, p.29.
In other Muslim countries, marriages are still arranged through parents, but there is some room for consultation with the intending bride and bridegroom.\textsuperscript{75} The weddings of Meitei Pangals are held according to the customs and tradition of Meiteis. At the start there is what is known as ‘\textit{Hainaba}’, i.e. the boy’s parents visit the girl’s house and meet her parents. Then both parents agree to the next meeting, known as ‘\textit{yathang thaba}’ (yathang-order; thaba- sent). In this meeting the parents of the girl give their consent for the wedding. This is followed by ‘\textit{waroipot puba}’, the relatives bring food items and finally the contract for the wedding is sealed. Then the engagement, known as ‘\textit{Heijingpot puba}’ is announced among the friends and relatives.

Marriage by elopement though not permitted by Islam takes place through the mutual decision of the boy and the girl, not necessarily with the knowledge of the parents. Marriage by elopement has become a common phenomenon among the Pangals in Manipur which is influenced by the Meitei Practice of ‘\textit{Nupi Chenba}’. In an elopement the man takes the woman to a friend’s house and spends the night there. In the morning the groom’s father with his male relatives or friends go together to the woman’s residence and make a proposal for marriage. If it is acceptable the ‘\textit{Nikah}’ is performed on the second night after the elopement either at the residence of the bride or groom. In case of a negative response, the marriage is deferred till an agreement is reached.\textsuperscript{76} In Manipur elopement is a customary practice and does not invite social ostracism.

\textsuperscript{74} A Rahaman, opcit. p.6.
\textsuperscript{75} Mohammad Ahmed Ali Shah, op cit, p 4
Although the Muslim marriage Nikah incorporated Meitei matrimonial features, it excluded the ‘lei –koiba’ (or 7 rounds taken by the Meitei bride around the Tulsi in the Sumang (courtyard) in the midst of which the bridegroom is seated). However since patriarchy was deeply entrenched not only among the Muslims but also in Meitei society the Meitei women who married Muslim men had no option but to convert to Islam. It is however significant, that these Meitei women converts to a greater or lesser degree retained their traditional belief system an index of their empowerment in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. However the Meitei women in these centuries used to follow the practice of praying before lunch, wearing a traditional Meitei phanek (Muka/Muga/Silk sarong) as did all Meitei women. When Muhammad Shani who was leader of the Muslims was appointed as Qazi (judge) he was legally able to preside over ‘Nikah’, but he never insisted on the bride, groom, and marriage party being attired in traditional Muslim dress. Moreover, the wives of the first Muslims were proficient and only knowledgeable about Meitei cuisine. Also the tradition and rituals preceding the ‘Nikah’ were basically Meitei, example the Heijingpot. Heijingpot- On the morning or evening of the auspicious day fixed for the occasion, the grooms party comprising of the groom’s parents, relatives and invitees goes to the girl’s house bringing fruits like heikru (phylanthus emblium), heining (spondias mangifera), heitup (pyrus pashia), kabok (puffed rice), betal nut and leaves as an act of offering to the progenitor of the girl’s lineage and the presiding god of the girl’s family, and kabok, sweets, etc. for

77 Interview with S.M. Sheikh op. cit..
78 Ibid
distribution among the persons who have attended the ceremony. In the past, women in fine traditional costumes used to go in line bringing ‘phiruks’ (bamboo box) and ‘lukmais’ (bamboo trays) which contain the above mentioned gifts on their heads, and they were followed by male folk. Heijingpot puba is the last ceremonial occasion to be performed prior to the actual betrothal ceremony of the marriage by engagement.\(^7^9\)

The Muslims like the Meiteis held a traditional wedding feast- ‘Mangani Chakouba’ on the 5\(^{th}\) day after the wedding- the traditional practice associated with Meitei weddings. Besides the Manipur King giving Meitei women in marriage to Muslim, some Meitei women were ready to do so, as they found that the Muslims were skilled and proficient in many diverse vocations.\(^8^0\)

A measure of Meitei women’s influence is illustrated by the fact that many Muslims interviewed, especially women, stated that they still share a common bond with their Meitei sisters, and wanted to reinforce this bond. The interviewees however stated that the Meiteis did not possess adequate knowledge about the Muslims, possibly because the former practiced a different religion- Islam. But Muslim women are not viewed as a community apart, and want to share a common platform with the Meiteis.\(^8^1\)

Widows may remarry, but not with their deceased husband’s brothers. There is no ceremony for the remarriage of widows. In polygamous households

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\(^{8^0}\) Interview with Meinam Baratun Bibi, 75 year old women, Yairipok Tulihal, 28/9/2017

\(^{8^1}\) Ibid
the husband’s attentions to several wives are strictly regulated according to precedence, the eldest getting twice the nominal share of the wife next below her.\textsuperscript{82} The marriage of widow had to be performed from their natal homes. With reference to the relation between wife and husband: ‘A Muslim women is obedient to her husband not because of an inferiority, but because she accepts him as her guardian.’\textsuperscript{83} This is common in all patriarchal societies across the world.

\textsuperscript{82} T.C. Hodson, opcit, p., 77.

\textsuperscript{83} Salam Irene op. cit., p. 70. Cit Tingneichong Gangte- Women’s Role in the Twenty Century Manipur A Historical study, published Ph.D. Thesis, Manipur University, 2008, p. 68.